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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BAYELSA STATE SEEKING PEACE WITH MILITANTS

REF: ABUJA 1600

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Poloffs on August 1, Dimieri Von Kemedi, Head of the Due Process and eGovernance Bureau for Bayelsa State reported efforts by Bayelsa State to negotiate a permanent peace with militant groups operating in the State. Kemedi indicated that key militant groups had approached the government of Bayelsa State seeking peace. The State is developing a training program for former militants and the governor is optimistic about pacifying the State. Success will depend on the economic opportunities (if any) available to reformed militant youth. End Summary.

Bayelsa's Militants Say They Want to Disarm

12. (C) According to Kemedi the majority of militants in Bayelsa State wants peace. Since December 2007, when Bayelsa State entered into agreements with the militants, there have been no major incidents, Kemedi claimed, with the notable exception of the June 19 attack on Shell's Bonga offshore oil facility. (Note: the newspaper Business Day Online reported on August 1 that Bayelsa State had signed a "Peace Pact" with 14 militant groups, and Champion Newspaper quoted Governor Sylva as saying his State was the "most peaceful in the region." According to the same press report, Governor Sylva claimed that Bayelsa State would be "free of militants within the year." End Note.) According to Kemedi, the State's December 2007 agreement with the militants involved paying them a living allowance in return for their not engaging in militant activities. The State pays approximately five million naira (\$43,000) per month to a camp of 450 youths.

13. (C) Kemedi reported that there are five main militant camps operating in Bayelsa, and one of these came to the government last year looking to negotiate a permanent peace. While the State government was still trying to work out details including training and employment opportunities for members of this group, the leaders of two other camps approached the government. At this point the government reached out to the remaining camps. Although some of the militant commanders wanted to see just what program for reintegration the government developed, they were not fundamentally hostile, according to Kemedi. Kemedi had just

returned from Ghana where he had been in negotiations with the government there for the establishment of a training camp for former militant youth. He argued that it was important for the youths to be taken out of their environment during their training. He expects three hundred youth to take part in the first training program and hopes to train a total of one thousand.

Delta and Rivers States have Different Strategies

¶4. (C) Asked about Delta and Rivers States, Kemedi said that Delta State had also sought to pay off the militants, but that the main militant, Government Mbambolo Ekpemupolo, commonly known as Tom Polo, has been "overfed". In contrast with Bayelsa State, which is giving just enough so that the youths don't starve, Delta is paying so much that the militant commanders have developed an appetite for more. In Rivers State the governor, Rotimi Amaechi, is pursuing a very different strategy of trying to eliminate the militant groups by force of arms.

¶5. (C) Comment: The cease-fire with militants is a good sign, but the training objectives seem vague and it is not clear just what kind of job prospects will be available for reformed militant youths. Without rapid economic development leading to expanding employment opportunities, the training will have little utility and the peace will be short-lived.
End Comment.
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